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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2018
TAGS: EAID EAGR PREL SL
SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE NOT IN FOOD CRISIS - YET

REF: FREETOWN 204

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) has yet to declare a food emergency, but rising prices and limited ability to mitigate the ensuing economic and social ramifications will lead them to do so in the coming days, based on comments by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to both the Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission (Note: We have no yet received an official GoSL request. End Note.). Assessments detailing the potential shortfall in food and necessary donor support are being conducted, in conjunction with the GoSL, over the next week by experts from the World Food Program. The USAID regional food expert arrived in-country on May 12 to gather information from key stakeholders for USG response data. The donor community as a whole is awaiting the results of these various assessments before committing resources. The embassy will provide further details as they become available in septel.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: The GoSL's reticence to declare a state of emergency or make official requests for aid, to this point, is not a sign that Sierra Leone is immune from the affects of the global food crisis. As reported reftel, scarcity is not yet an issue, but the high prices are being felt deeply and painfully in the pockets of an already economically compromised country. Official, public calls for support could inflame an anxious but relatively calm nation into full-scale panic - a situation the GoSL is working hard to avoid. The assessments will likely show that the food crisis will be dire in Sierra Leone without ameliorative assistance. A request for aid via diplomatic channels, when made, will likely be done quietly and urgently. END COMMENT.

PERRY